

Duxbury Field Notes

By FAHY BYGATE

Duxbury Clipper

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Migration is in full swing and warblers have arrived! Warblers, tanagers, thrushes, vireos, orioles...the lot. A Baltimore Oriole has been visiting our yard for a week now, whistling his complicated clear spring song. Black-throated Green Warblers, high in the pines, are singing "Trees, Trees, murmuring trees" in a minor key. Yellow Warblers, near Island Creek Pond, sing "Sweet, sweet, I am so sweet." Their companions in habitat, the Common Yellowthroats, must be from Kansas because they sing "Wichita, Wichita, Wichita" or Wichity, Wichity, Wichity." White-throated Sparrows, from under the bushes, say "Poor Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody" and Rufous-sided Towhees call "Drink Your Tea," over and over, and from deep in the woods, the loud calls of that tiny brown warbler, the Ovenbird, ring out, "Teacher, Teacher, Teacher!" Carolina Wrens compete with the Ovenbirds for clamorousness with their "Teakettle, Teakettle, Teakettle!" (I have always thought the Carolina Wren and the Rufous-sided Towhee should get together and open a teashop). The newly returned Bobolinks at Bay Farm have a song like breaking crystal and are burbling all over the meadows there. Luckily for birders with bad eyesight, like me, the songs of individual species of birds, are often very distinctive and easy to learn.

When I first started birding, it seemed to me that recognizing the call of any bird was some sort of idiot savant thing. Differentiating sights seems easy for our eyes, differentiating sounds seems, to our under-trained ears, terribly difficult. The cacophony of sound in the woods on an early morning in May is overwhelming and separating out any single song sometimes seems impossible. It can be like trying to single out, by sound, the voice of a friend in a huge crowd of shouting people. I tried listening to tape recordings of bird songs and they helped me to tune up my ears. Now, although I often have to start all over in May, relearning the Black-throated blues and the Magnolia warblers, miraculously, some of it sticks.

Bird song is everywhere right now. Just now, I heard a high, tinny sound from the tops of the oak trees in my yard. It turned out to be that spectacular warbler, the Blackburnian. This glorious bird with his "lit-from-within" glowing orange head and black markings has one of the highest pitched bird songs of the returning migrants. Sadly, it is often the Blackburnian song that is the first to disappear when loss of hearing begins to affect an aging birder. If learning the sounds of songbirds interests you, try the audiotapes, *Birding By Ear* by Richard Walton and Robert Lawson.

Report from a Duxbury Osprey Nest: Nancy Bennett reports that all seems to be well at the Bay Road Osprey nest. The male is demonstrating his devotion by bringing fish to the female and spelling her with the incubation duties on the nest. Sometimes she sits on the nearby perching pole while he takes his turn on the eggs. Gestation takes 34-40 days so we will be watching for tiny black and white heads peeking up in late June. Please keep a good distance from the pole if you visit an osprey nest area.